**Equality: Meaning, Features**

#### Equality is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. It is also the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of the way they were born, where they come from, what they believe, or whether they have a disability.

#### The French Revolutionaries demanded liberty along with equality and fraternity. The French Declaration of Rights categorically stated “Men are born and always continue to be free and equal in respect of their rights” The Preamble of the Indian Constitution defines Equality as one of the four basic objectives of the Indian polity, the other three .being Justice, Liberty and Fraternity.

#### Equality: Meaning:

**(1) Equality does not mean absolute equality:**

In common usage equality is taken to mean full equality of treatment and reward for all. It is demanded as natural equality. It is said that all men are born natural and free. However, despite a strong emotional appeal to our hearts, the notion of natural and absolute equality of all cannot be fully accepted and realised. Men are neither equal in respect of their physical features nor in respect of their mental abilities. Some are stronger others weaker and some are more intelligent and capable than others.

Their capacities and abilities are different. As such equality of treatment and rewards cannot be ensured. Rewards must depend upon the actual abilities and work of various people. Hence equality does not mean absolute and total equality.

Equality really means equal opportunities for development. In fact, when we talk of equality of all men we really mean general and fair equality and not absolute equality. We really talk of a fair distribution of opportunities reward and not equal reward for all.

**(2) Equality means absence of all unnatural and unjust inequalities:**

In society there are present two types of inequalities:

(1) Natural inequalities, and

(2) Man-made unnatural inequalities.

The former means natural differences among human beings. These have to be accepted by all. The man-made inequalities are those which are there because of some social conditions and discriminations. These are of the nature of socioeconomic inequalities resulting from the operation of social system. The discriminations practiced and inequalities maintained in the name of caste, colour, creed, religion, sex, place of birth and the like are all unnatural man- made inequalities. Equality means end of all such inequalities and discriminations.

#### Equality: Definitions:

“The Right to Equality proper is a right of equal satisfaction of basic human needs, including the need to develop and use capacities which are specifically human.” -D.D Raphall

“Equality means that no man shall be so placed in society that he can over-reach his neighbour to the extent which constitutes a denial of latter’s citizenship.” -Laski

“Equality means equal rights for all the people and the abolition of all special rights and privileges”. -Barker

Thus, negatively equality implies abolition of all special privileges and facilities which may be available to some classes or some persons in society. It also stands for the abolition of all man-made inequalities and discriminations. Positively Equality stands for equal rights, equitable distribution of resources , equal opportunities for development and relative equality with due recognition of merit, abilities and capacities of various persons.

#### Equality: Features:

1. Equality does not stand for absolute equality. It accepts the presence of some natural inequalities.

2. Equality stands for absence of all unnatural man- made inequalities and specially privileged classes in the society.

3. Equality postulates the grant and guarantee of equal rights and freedoms to all the people.

4. Equality implies the system of equal and adequate opportunities for all the people in society.

5. Equality means equal satisfaction of basic needs of all the persons before the special needs’, and luxuries of some persons may be met.

6. Equality advocates an equitable and fair distribution of wealth and resources i.e. Minimum possible gap between the rich and poor.

7. Equality accepts the principle of protective discrimination for helping the weaker sections of society. In the Indian political system, right to equality has been given to all and yet there stands incorporated provisions for granting special protection facilities and reservations to persons belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes Other Backward Classes, minorities, women, and children.

**Thus Equality stands for 3 Basic Features:**

(a) Absence of special privileges in society.

(b) Presence of adequate and equal opportunities for development for all.

(c) Equal satisfaction of basic needs of all.

**Equality of opportunity:**

It stands for equal rights and opportunities for development for all classes of people without any discrimination.

Specifically, it stands for:

(i) Absence of special privileges for any class or caste or religions group or an ethnic group;

(ii) Prohibition of discrimination against any one on the basis of caste, colour, creed, religion, sex and place of birth;

(iii) Free access to public places for all the people, i.e. no social segregation; and

(iv) Equality of opportunity for all people. It however accepts the concept of protective discrimination in favour of all weaker sections of society.

A modern central theme of equality of opportunity is to end gender inequality, to ensure equal status and opportunities to the women and to ensure equal rights of male and female children to live and develop.